

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism
March 2013

**The Hobbit
& SkyCity:
Govt exposed**

**Thousands
challenge
asset sales**

**Debt in
Aotearoa**

**Gay Liberation
Front 1969-1979**

**"We belong
to the water
and the water
belongs to us,"**
Annette Sykes

**Play review:
Black Faggot**

Bolivia's Red October

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E d i t o r i a l

Welcome to the first issue of *Fightback*, newspaper of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback is a nationwide socialist organisation with branches in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch. With this paper we plan to continue and develop our agitation for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

The fight against asset sales is a key struggle in Aotearoa/NZ. In this issue we lead with two articles on this struggle. Firstly, we report on the mass protest against asset sales, and argue for the need to fight at the point of production. Secondly, we interview Annette Sykes, a lawyer in the Maori Council claim against Crown commercialisation of water.

Last month, we reported on a strike planned by Christchurch teachers, which would have challenged both charter schools plans and laws against political strikes. This was called off and replaced with a march, which we cover. We also report on a successful mass teachers' strike in the Solomon Islands, where teachers are fighting for unpaid wages.

Internationalism is a key to workers' liberation, overcoming the imposed national divisions which drive down conditions overall. In an article on rising health insur-

ance costs under the Regional Seasonal Employer scheme, we argue the need to show solidarity with migrant workers.

During the global financial crisis, debt has received a lot of attention. We explain the Marxist theory of debt, which is necessary to the capitalist system. A second article debunks the myth of Iceland's "peaceful revolution" against debt and finance capital.

Fightback participates in Mana, an organisation in which tino rangitanga activists and revolutionary socialists work together. We review *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia*, a book by Jeffrey Webber, which has lessons relevant to the Mana movement.

Like all revolutions in communications technology, the internet is a necessary part of revolutionary organising today. Daphne Lawless covers Anonymous a concept hackers participate in which is not socialist, but which the socialist movement can learn from.

Like all fights against oppression, queer liberation must be integral to socialist politics. We provide a snapshot of the Gay Liberation movement, 1969-1979; and finally conclude with a review of *Black Faggot*, a play about the "gay Samoan male experience."

In Brief

Telecom to cut hundreds of jobs

Telecom chief executive Simon Moutter has stated that the company will cut "hundreds" of jobs over the next 10 months. When asked by media if "hundreds" meant that cuts would be limited to three figures and no more than 1000 jobs would go, Moutter responded that he was "not willing to be any more specific at this point". The cuts will be a significant percentage of Telecom's workforce- currently at 7,000. Telecom share prices went up after the announcement was made.

Legislation Further Stigmatises Beneficiaries

The latest welfare reform legislation will allow the romantic partners of beneficiaries to be prosecuted if they are deemed to be in a relationship "in the nature of marriage".

According to Auckland Action Against Poverty spokesperson Sarah Thompson "The effect of these changes will be that even more low income people are criminalised because of the State's interference in this sensitive area, and will lose what income and assets they may have."

"A new category of beneficiaries will be created called 'low trust beneficiaries' - who will be treated as an inferior class of beneficiary, subject to even more intimidation and harassment than already applies."

Aus-NZ pay gap continues to widen

The wage gap between the median wage in Australia and the median wage in New Zealand has now reached the point where a worker in Australia earns in four days what a worker in New Zealand earns in five, with wages in Australia now \$180 higher for a forty hour week.

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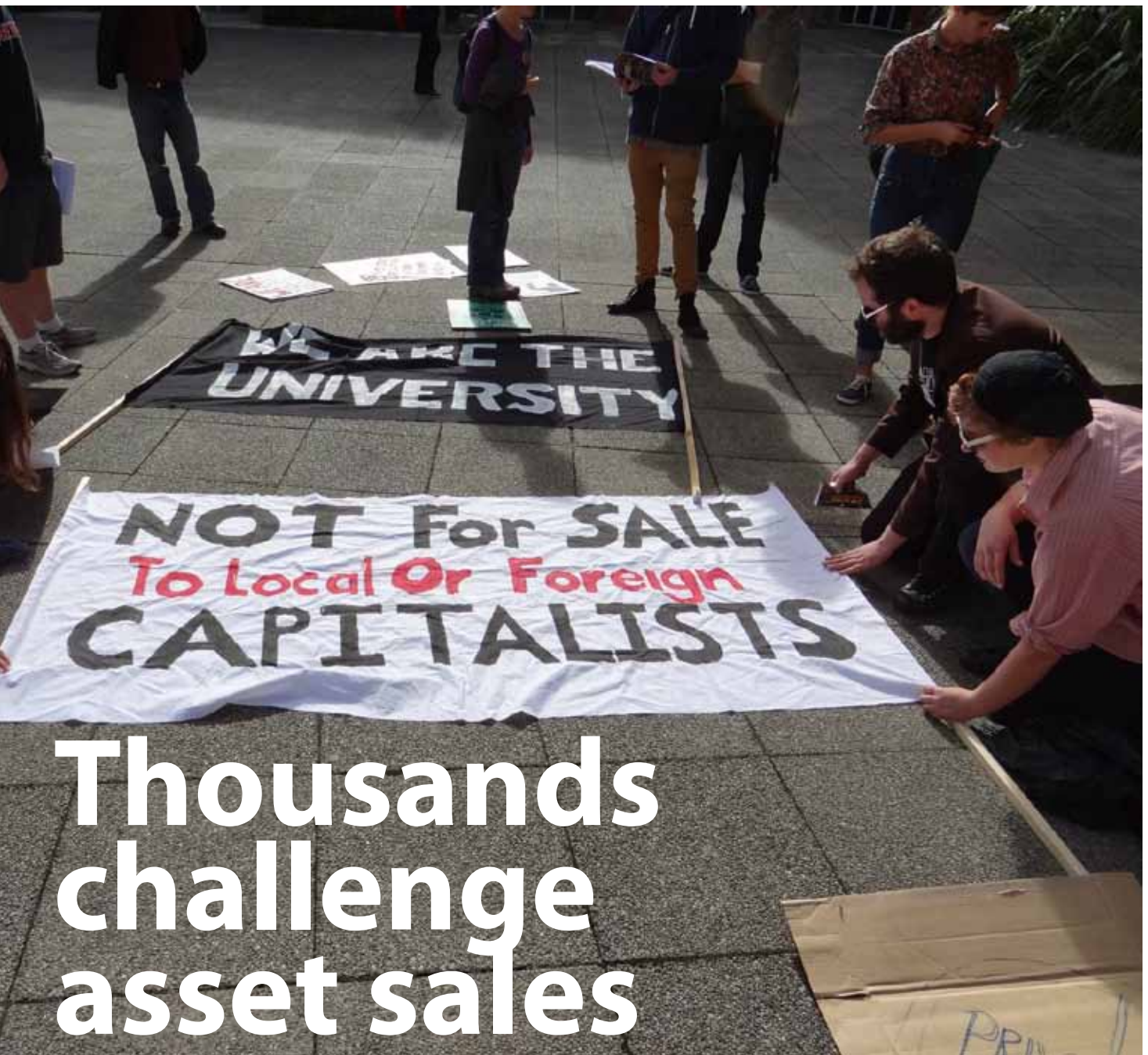
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Asset sales



Thousands challenge asset sales

This article by Jared Phillips, member of Fightback, was originally published in The Socialist, the paper of the Socialist Party of Australia.

At the beginning of 2011 the ruling National Party in New Zealand announced electoral policy for the partial sale of several major state assets including the Solid Energy coal company, Air New Zealand, and three major power companies – Mighty River Power, Meridian Energy, and Genesis Energy.

After its re-election and the formation of a coalition government with

the ACT party and the Maori Party in late-2011, the government has pursued the sale despite the policy being very unpopular.

At the beginning of 2011 the ruling National Party in New Zealand (Aotearoa) announced electoral policy for the partial sale of several major state assets including the Solid Energy coal company, Air New Zealand, and three major power companies – Mighty River Power, Meridian Energy, and Genesis Energy.

After its re-election and the formation of a coalition government with the ACT party and the Maori Party in

late-2011, the government has pursued the sale despite the policy being very unpopular.

A TV3 poll conducted in early 2012 found that only 35% of people surveyed agreed with the sales while 3.5% were unsure and 63% opposed the sales. As a consequence a broad opposition of diverse forces has formed and driven a struggle on the streets, in the courts, and by successfully pushing for a referendum on the issue.

The stated aim of the part sale of these assets is to free up \$10 billion (NZD) to reduce government debt and establish a surplus by 2013/2014. In relation to the

sales Prime Minister John Key stated, "Weaker global growth, particularly in our key export markets in Asia and Australia, will put downward pressure on the demand for our exports. That will have a real and noticeable effect on the New Zealand economy, which is expected to grow somewhat slower than was predicted at the end of 2011."

This demonstrates the connection between the world economic crisis and the asset sales. It shows that the ruling National Party is prepared to carry out policies which force ordinary people to pay for the impact of the world economic crisis.

One point of resistance has been the significant demonstrations in New Zealand's major cities and a hikoi. The hikoi was organised by prominent Maori activists such as Mike Smith and by the Mana Party – a party that came about as a left split from the Maori Party because of its collaboration with the National Party-led Government.

The hikoi began at the top of the North Island in April 2012 and after 11 days reached the parliament in Wellington. Within the hikoi there were local marches through the major centres – including an 8,000 strong march in Auckland and a 5,000 strong march in Wellington – which left and socialist organisations had helped to organise.

The 'Aotearoa Not For Sale' coalition was prominent in the Auckland demonstration. The presence of large numbers of locked-out meat processing workers, including a large contingent in Hamilton and a speaker at the rally outside parliament, helped to draw the connection between employer attacks on workers and the governments' attack on public assets.

Another point of resistance has been the united action of Maori people. A One News poll found that while 75% of people opposed asset sales the number amongst Maori people was 88%.

To facilitate the sales the government introduced the Public Finance (Mixed

Ownership Model) Amendment Act 2012 and sought to place assets under that Act – removing them from the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986.

The 1986 SOE Act, introduced by the Labour Party, was entirely regressive in that it transformed public services into entities run as corporations for profit. However, it contained the provision that "Nothing in this Act shall permit the Crown to act in a manner that is inconsistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi." This is seen to provide protection against asset sales because Maori land and resource claims made in accordance with The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 binds the Crown not private companies.

The government held several sham consultation meetings with Maori about the changes. However, frustrated by the charade of consultation, Maori called a national hui involving Iwi leaders, Maori corporations, urban Maori authorities and others.

Being in a coalition with National, the Maori Party was reluctant to attend the hui. But after being ridiculed by Maori people for its position it ended up sending a delegation. At the hui Annette Sykes, president of the Mana Party, advocated that the sales be 'halted for good'. The hui resulted in agreement against the sales across the overwhelming majority of Maori entities. The government responded by announcing a 'Shares Plus' scheme which would entitle Maori Iwi to cheaper shares in an attempt to lure the leaders into supporting the sales. This was roundly rejected.

The NZ Maori Council also filed a High Court application for a judicial review of government decisions to remove Mighty River Power from the SOE Act and place 49% of its shares on the stock market in the third quarter of 2012.

Mighty River was to be the first asset to be floated.

The application was made on the basis that the government's actions interfered with Maori water rights. The legal

action successfully stalled the sale. The High Court then ruled against the NZ Maori Council which has subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court where a hearing is set down for early 2013. The Mana Party's Annette Sykes, herself a prominent Maori lawyer who has been very involved in the proceedings has been careful to emphasise that this legal process can slow down the sales but the only way to win a political solution will be through struggle.

One aspect of the struggle is the 'Keep Our Assets' campaign to get over 300,000 people to sign a petition in favour of a referendum against the sales. Despite supporting privatisations previously the Labour Party have bent to the public mood and are participating in the campaign. The Greens are playing a prominent role in the campaign but are really using it to boost their own electoral fortunes. They do not offer an economic alternative to capitalism which is why they refuse to pledge to renationalise the assets if they are in a position of power after the next election. Trade unions, community groups, the Mana Party and socialist organisations have also energetically supported the campaign. Opportunistically the conservative NZ First Party has also been involved in this campaign. In January it was announced that the campaign has got over 300,000 signatures and that a referendum should go ahead.

While socialists have serious differences with the pro-capitalist forces that are involved in this campaign, we participate in order to present the strongest possible opposition to the government's plans. While working to stop this round of attacks we also point out that it was the Labour Party that was behind the first round of privatisations of assets in the mid-1980s.

We also explain that the right-wing nationalism of NZ First and the soft left nationalism of other elements in the campaign will only work to divide ordinary people. The best way to win is to

Asset sales/Privatisation

employ a strategy that unites all sections of the working class – the class with the most latent power in society.

The problem that working class people in New Zealand have is that they are currently without a mass party that can bring them together and represent them in the parliament and in the various struggles that are taking place.

People's attitude to the Labour opposition was highlighted in a recent TV3-Reid Research Poll where its leader, David Shearer, was polling a mere 8.5%. The crisis in Labour is rooted in the fact that most people see them as no different to National. This opens up huge opportunities for a party to the left of Labour to grow.

Given the deep seated opposition to asset sales it makes sense for trade unions, community groups and left parties like Mana to put forward a bold political alternative to privatisation. This should include fighting for the total public ownership of the major sectors of the economy under democratic workers' and community control. This could be won by uniting all sections of the working class in New Zealand into a mass struggle.

Public rallies are a good first step but if they were combined with widespread industrial action the government would not only be forced to reverse its plans but it could be brought down quickly. On the basis of public ownership of big industry and the banks a democratic plan of production could be implemented to grow the economy while simultaneously creating jobs and building the homes and services that society needs.

This is the type of future we need to fight for in New Zealand, as opposed to allowing whichever establishment party is in power to make us pay for an economic crisis that we did not create.

Shortly before we went to press the Supreme Court ruled against the Maori Council.

Annette Sykes: "We belong to the water and the water belongs to us"

Fightback argues for nationalisation of resources, such as water, under community control. In 2011 a Waitangi Tribunal claim, on proprietary title to water, challenged government plans to sell off private shares in power companies – particularly Mighty River Power.

Annette Sykes is a lawyer involved in the water claim, a Mana candidate, and long-time tino rangitanga activist. Fightback writer Ian Anderson interviewed her on Waitangi Day 2013.

The Spark: What is the nature of the claim?

Annette Sykes: The water rights claim arises from a number of claims that have been in place for several years, on the relationship that Maori have with water. Many Maori say that "I am the water and the water is me," so this connection gives rise to a sense of identity. For many Maori that identity is threatened once those resources are taken out of public control and placed in private use.

So the claim goes to these aspects; the Treaty affirms a relationship between hapu, iwi and tangata whenua with their water-ways; that water-ways are vital to the survival and essence of life, once they're taken out of public owner-

ship into private ownership, it threatens the very existence and identity of those tribal identities; and those rights have been extant by virtue of the Treaty, and have been upheld by various iwi.

In this particular case with the Waikato river tribes, this has been upheld by various settlements, but there has never been any serious effort to give those settlements force, to prevent commercialisation of those resources.

The Spark: What's the impact of commercialisation?

AS: First of all, my clients are most concerned about the environment health of the waters themselves. They point to the ECNZ (Electricity Corporation of New Zealand) and SOE (State-Owned Enterprises) privatisation processes to say that the health of the water-ways in the Whanganui river and the Waikato river has certainly suffered. So the environmental degradation is more likely to be increased, under an progressively commercialised model of management. The second thing about commercialisation, is our people say that power becomes more expensive, so the right to heat as part of the right to shelter is actually at threat. The public well-being and the community wellbeing of these hapu is threatened.

The Hobbit and SkyCity: Government's priorities laid bare

Writers for Fightback

Information released in late February on the *Hobbit* labour dispute and the

SkyCity convention centre deal lays the National government's priorities bare. In both cases, the government prioritised the needs of business owners over all other concerns.

The Spark: What's your involvement been so far?

AS: As a lawyer I've coordinated a number of people's participation in the Treaty of Waitangi case. I was then instructing solicitors for Pouakani, which is one of the main claimants. Pouakani have lands that border the Waikato river, where three dams have been erected by ECNZ and privatised into Mighty River Power dams, and of course Mighty River Power is the first SOE off the block, so my people are an integral part of monitoring that.

We went to the High Court and the Supreme Court as a result of our concerns to protect our rights. Pouakani is also going to Supreme Court on the 18th of February to argue a slightly different argument, a proxy rights argument, that notwithstanding the passage of time, they have rights to land in the beds of rivers and that the dams have been constructed in a way which is a trespass against those rights. That's a separate case.

The Spark: How do you respond to arguments that nobody owns water?

AS: Well that comes back again to the question of "what are property rights?" If you look at the capitalist view of resources, they developed an approach that only resources that can be captured in a certain well or in a certain receptacle, can be owned and claimed.

Maori law is different to this; the water is us and we are the water, from both a physiological and spiritual point of view.

Everyone's bodies are made up 70% of water so where you've taken your waters, where you bathe, are all part of the physical make-up of an individual. So when I say "I am Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotoiti is me," that's not just a notional aspect, Lake Rotoiti is the source of waters that have fed and nurtured me. We belong to the water and the water belongs to us, and therefore that relationship requires protection.

The Spark: It's also worth noting that even if water isn't legally property, entities such as corporations profit from its use. Is sale on any terms acceptable, including sale of shares to iwi?

AS: Well, our experience with the Sealords deal, which was an effort to participate in capitalist models, would make me very hesitant to see that kind of model. If we are to merge a guardianship responsibility into the process, then that guardianship responsibility must assure public ownership, and iwi can become part of the decision-making process by becoming part of a public trust organisation.

Bruce Jesson is one of the few that tried to grapple with this, when looking at privatisation of water in Auckland, and he made absolutely clear that there would be a statutory bar on sale of either shares or long-term use of the water. I would support that kind of public ownership model recognising spiritual relationships and guardianship responsibility of Maori.

The Spark: What stage is the Tribunal

process at?

AS: We're through Stage 1, and the Tribunal has said that if the government proceed to sale it will be a breach of the Treaty, so we've been trying to stop the sale. That's still my focus.

If we lose in the Supreme Court, then I will resurrect Stage 2 of the Waitangi Tribunal process, and I will be seeking specific definitions or findings from the Tribunal about the nature and extent of rights that have been breached, and then seeking some kind of compensatory or restitutionary approach from the Crown.

The Spark: Can this be addressed solely through court?

AS: No. I'll be really clear, I'm the sand-bagger, and I've been doing my sand-bagging job very well. The hikoi, and protest movements, need to be educating the masses about what's happening. I've gone into the Waitangi Tribunal process and the courts basically as a barrier to prevent commercial exploitation, or to slow the process down, while other strategies are being developed.

The key one that I've spent a lot of effort promoting is the petition strategy, so that we have public awareness and signatures, so that we make it very clear that there is an elite group of decision-makers in Cabinet making decisions against the will of a great majority of people. The fact that we've got over 300,000 signatures in less than 9 months is testimony to that. Communities which I grew up in have never recovered from privatisation.

On February 19th, the office of the deputy auditor-general released a report on the controversial SkyCity deal. SkyCity was given the contract for an international convention centre in exchange for a law allowing 500 more pokies in its casino.

This report placed the blame on civil servants, rather than the government per se. However, in an opinion piece published the following week, promi-

nent bourgeois commentator Rod Oram highlighted the "whitewash" and contradictions in this report.

Oram notes that SkyCity extensively lobbied the government to reject alternative options, such as a publicly owned convention centre. Before the government opened up an Expression Of Interest (EOI) in 2010, SkyCity had already been working with the government for a year and had met with

government representatives including the Prime Minister.

Oram notes the message this sends to businesses, "If you want to build a convention centre, school, road, hospital, prison or any other form of infrastructure, don't bother with the appropriate processes... deal directly with the prime minister."

It's also telling that the government

continued at p. 7

neglected the option of a publicly owned convention centre, and instead prioritised gambling profiteers. While community organisations focus on helping individuals with gambling addictions, those who profit from casinos remain untouched. The only challenge to SkyCity has come from wage claims by Unite members, a struggle which must be defended and extended.

More recently, information released on the *Hobbit* labour dispute exposed more lies used to justify profiteering. On February 26th documents released under the Official Information Act covered the relationship between New Line Cinema, Peter Jackson and the government during the *Hobbit* labour dispute of 2010.

Actors from Aotearoa/NZ were claiming rights such as residuals, which are royalties for ongoing screenings and are internationally recognised. In fact they were supported both by Australian union the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) and Actors Equity in the UK. Although Peter Jackson threatened moving production to the UK or Eastern Europe, the documents reveal that New Line never planned to move production.

Ultimately the government amended existing labour laws to serve New Line Cinema and Peter Jackson, turning actors into independent contractors. This reflects an increasing move towards turning workers, who have no property and no control over hiring and firing, into "independent contractors" with no right to organise.

Whichever party is in power, capitalist governments serve capitalists, at the expense of workers' rights and democracy. If we don't show solidarity with actors in the film industry, or workers at SkyCity, we cannot begin to build an alternative. Transformation of these institutions can only come through democratic organisations of the people.

Hundreds turn out against Christchurch School closures

by Byron Clark

Christchurch primary school teachers had planned to take industrial action on February 19th but it was called off just a few days prior. Under the Employment Relations Act strikes outside of bargaining are outlawed, had this strike taken place it would have been the first one to challenge the anti-strike laws.

In the end however, teachers took action in the form of a rally outside of school hours. Over a 1500 people gathered at the CBS arena in Addington, the number were made up of teachers, parents, children and other supporters include from a number of other unions.

After a number of short speeches attendees voted on a motion of no confidence in Hekia Parata's record as Education Minister. That motion was then delivered to the ministry of education following a lively march which included chants of "when Christchurch schools are under attack, stand up! Fight back!" and "Hek no- she must go!"

A Fairfax poll released the day after the education rally showed that 71% of people in Canterbury thought Parata

should be stripped of the education portfolio. In addition to the "shake up" in Christchurch (seven schools to be closed and 12 to be merged) Parata has presided over the ongoing problems with Novapay and last year attempted to increase class sizes being backing down.

Of course, handing the education portfolio to another minister would not fix the problems faced in Christchurch any more than stripping Paula Bennett of the welfare policy would stop the government's insidious welfare reforms. Government policy appears to be what has been termed "disaster capitalism" using a natural disaster as an excuse to restructure education in the city, both through the current closures and later through the imposition of charter schools.

The government's plans can be defeated if teachers and supporters take militant action, particularly in the workplace.

Solidarity needed: Stop increases to migrant seasonal workers health insurance

by Byron Clark

The death this year of a Tongan worker employed under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme has sparked discussions between Tonga's Ministry of Internal Affairs and the insurance company he paid for his health cover. The issue is whether the worker

died because of a pre-existing condition or from a new condition or accident.

The RSE scheme allows employers in the horticulture and viticulture industries to bring in migrant workers, mostly from the South Pacific, during the busy season to fill labour shortages. Although these workers pay tax in New Zealand they are not eligible for public

Solomon Islands teachers' strike and win

by Byron Clark

While Christchurch teachers planned their strike against school closures and the imposition of charter schools (later called off and replaced with a rally) 9,000 teachers in the Solomon islands took part in industrial action seeking unpaid wages.

Last year the government promised to increase teacher salaries with back pay for 2012, yet the required extra funding was not included in the 2013 budget-though money was allocated to give members of parliament a pay rise.

"It seems that there's always money for them, but when it comes to these legitimate claims by unions, whether it be teachers, nurses, doctors or lawyers, they say they don't have money for that." Solomon Islands National Teachers Association (SINTA) president Sampson Faisi told *Radio Australia*.

SINTA members went on strike indefinitely. Their industrial action was illegal, with the Trade Disputes Panel (TDP) ruling that teachers should call off the strike. Donald Marahari, legal counsel for the union, told media that members

were aware of this but had decided to strike anyway.

Teachers risked six months imprisonment and large fines. Attorney General Billy Titiulu also stated that teachers involved in the strike would be denied benefits after they retire.

Teachers from the provinces converged on the capital Honiara, wearing red to show solidarity. "Unlike previous teacher strikes where there were differences, this one has seen a strong solidarity amongst teachers." Faisi told the *Solomon Star News*.

Parents supported the strike and many of them turned out at the protest. One of those in attendance, Richard Watekari, said that as parents, they feel the teachers have the right to stand their ground.

It took just one week for the government to give in. After two days of intensive negotiations a consent order was signed stating that the government would fulfil its promises to the teachers and settle all outstanding claims. The agreement also ensured no teachers participating in the industrial action would be penalised.

health care and require private health insurance.

The ministry's deputy chief executive, Meleoni Uera, told *Radio New Zealand International* that the policy needs to be revised even if it results in RSE workers – on top of taxes – having to pay higher insurance premiums and also pay for additional mandatory medical checks.

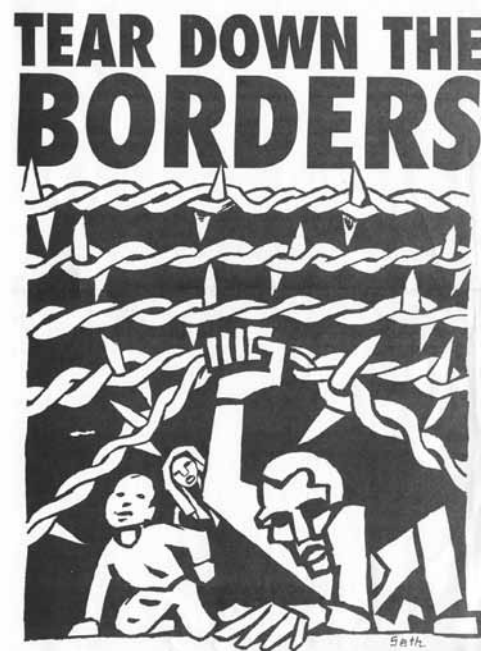
"It is an area that we will look at... (with) thorough discussion with different parties because cost will be involved in the whole process, and for a lot of this it will be the seasonal workers currently, they bear the cost of any addi-

tional checks."

The cause of death is unknown. The man was the second Tongan RSE worker to die while working in New Zealand in the last six years. The other died of a heart attack. A Ni-Vanuatu worker also died in New Zealand in that time.

The New Zealand-based Tonga Advisory Council is reminding potential applicants for the RSE scheme to make full disclosures, particularly about health.

Being required to pay taxes, but not receive public health care is disadvantaging to RSE workers. The attitude of internal affairs is to increase that disadvantage by increasing the already

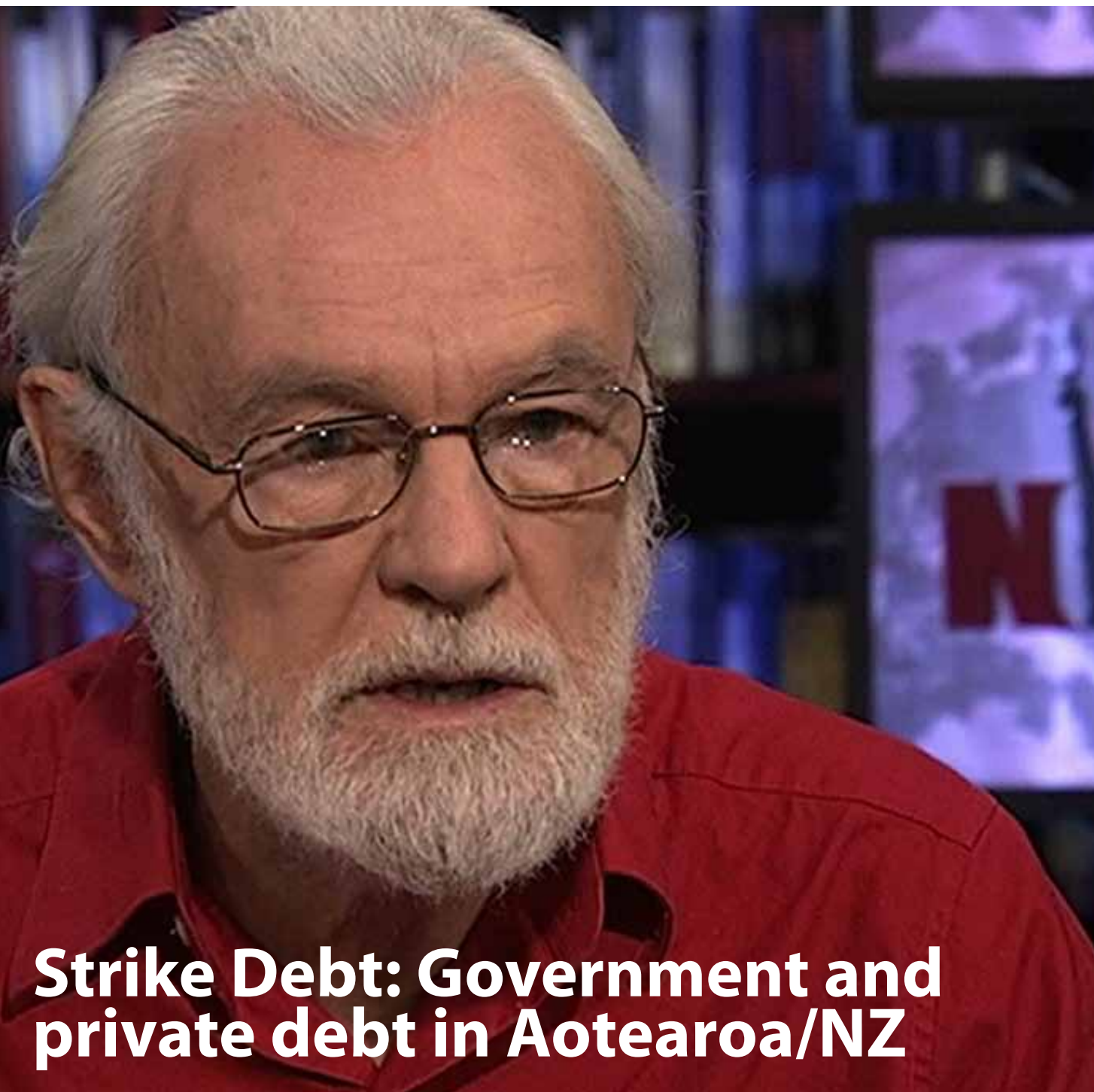


burdensome costs of health insurance. These are the types of disadvantages that migrant workers frequently face.

The government will seek to show that RSE workers with medical conditions are 'cheating' the system. The issue then is why people would travel to a foreign country when they have serious health issues. The answer is simple; people are becoming desperate in the search for comparably better incomes than are available in their own countries. It is the same with the 53,700 people, in 2012 alone, who left New Zealand looking for a better life in Australia.

Just as some Australian unions show common cause with New Zealand workers in Australia, workers in New Zealand must align themselves with the RSE workers here. New Zealand residents do not gain anything from the exploitation or ill-treatment of RSE workers. And they certainly won't profit from the New Zealand government forcing tax-paying RSE workers to pay higher premiums to insurance companies.

Campaigning against debt



Strike Debt: Government and private debt in Aotearoa/NZ

Marxist theorist David Harvey speaking on *Democracy Now*.

by Ian Anderson

Debt has received a lot of attention during the global financial crisis. Occupy sites abounded with theories about “debt slavery.” Governments, and international financial institutions, justify harsh austerity measures by pointing to government debt.

We must examine debt closer: what is

its purpose? Who does it benefit? Is it necessary?

Fictitious capital: Necessary evil for capitalism

Debt is a form of “fictitious capital,” capital not generated by production. Mainstream economists define fictitious capital as the value of “future cash flows.” Given the present financial

crisis, triggered by the collapse of loans that could not be paid back, defining debt as “future cash flows” seems a little optimistic.

Marxists argue rather that fictitious capital is a claim to property ownership, by the lender. A mortgage is a claim on property, and until it is paid back the bank owns the house. In *The Limits to Capital*, Marxist political economist David Harvey notes the strange

Campaigning against debt

Productivity vs Real Wages

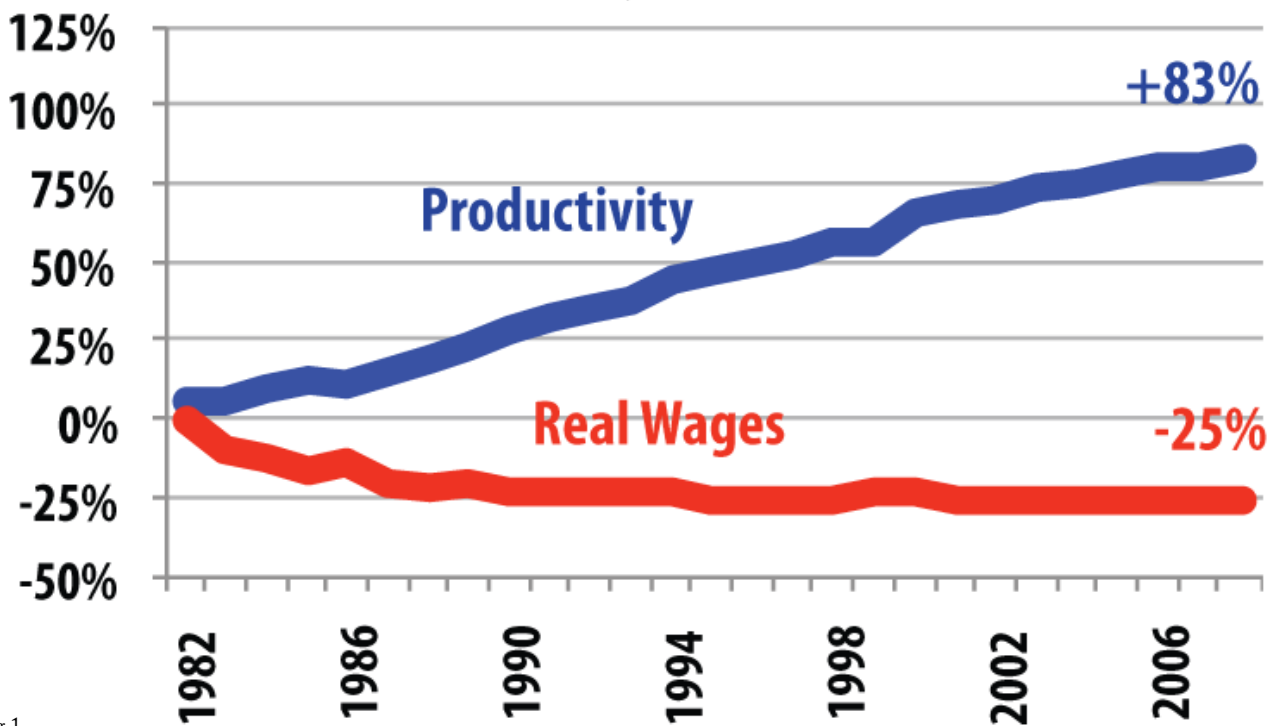


Fig 1

importance and universality of fictitious capital:

“The money capitalist is indifferent (presumably) to the ultimate source of revenue and invests in government debt, mortgages, stocks and shares, commodity futures or whatever... [Marx] wishes to alert us to the insanity of a society in which investment in appropriation (rents, government debts, etc) appears just as important as investment in production” (*The Limits to Capital*, David Harvey, p269).

However, Harvey also warns against drawing a simplistic line between finance and “real” production. While some (often anti-semitic) conspiracy theories suggest that bankers are perverting the natural course of capitalism, profitable financial institutions are necessary to generalised capitalist production. Banks centralise the means of exchange, and lend out the initial capital for private production:

“When the system of exchange is relatively simple, the personal knowledge and trust of individual capitalists may guarantee the quality of debts incurred, but in a complex market system this cannot form an adequate foundation for the credit system. The bank seeks to institutionalize what was before a matter of personal trust and credibility” (ibid, p247).

Banks and financial institutions must also make a profit – which means interest, predatory lending, speculation, incentives to gamble with workers’ savings as poker chips. Although they can be regulated or stabilised, predatory financial institutions are a necessary evil for capitalism.

Neoliberalism: Attacking wages and expanding fictitious capital

Capitalism is not driven simply by debt.

To understand the basis of debt, we must understand the organisation of work and production – the way society is structured to meet basic needs (or to deny basic needs).

Capitalists have two main ways of increasing productivity: improving production methods, and intensifying exploitation. In Aotearoa/NZ, the ruling class has generally intensified exploitation, rather than investing in production. In 2010, research and development totalled 1.3% of GDP, about half the OECD average.

Instead capitalists have raised productivity by working people harder. According to the Department of Labour, 34.79% of full-time workers work “long hours” of 50 or more. At the same time, around 6.5% of workers are unemployed, with the situation particularly bad for youth. Long hours and underemployment coincide, an irrationally uneven organisation of work designed to divide workers. Suzanne Snively, member of the Reserve Bank Board of Directors during the crucial reform period of 1985-1992 states:

Campaigning against debt

"It was a manageable thing for the Reserve Bank to use employment, and unemployment, as the way to get wages down. It was far easier than any other means of getting inflation down. So they used it."

Neoliberal capitalism has responded to declining profitability by cutting back on labour costs, and by expansion of fictitious capital. Along with union-busting and casualisation, the "spatial fix" of outsourcing has driven down workers' incomes. Real wages have fallen 25% in the last 30 years, (Fig 1) while extension of private loans has covered the short-fall in savings.

Government and household debt

Aotearoa/NZ has a "national debt" of around \$75 billion. However, "national debt" as a category obscures different kinds of debt; private debt, government debt. Although these are both basically fictitious, they serve different purposes within capitalism.

Household debt patches up short-falls in income and savings. If someone takes out a mortgage on an existing house, only the bank profits from the transaction, and nothing is produced in the process. Student debt is an extension of private debt into education, although managed by the state. By contrast, government debt is incurred to make investments that boost productivity: building roads, telecommunications networks, and other infrastructure. Therefore a government, unlike a household, can generate productivity by taking on debt (see *Is the Whole World Going Bankrupt?*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, December 2012).

National has emphasised government debt to justify their piecemeal "death by a thousand cuts" policies. In a Close Up appearance, defending cuts in the 2012 Budget, Prime Minister John Key explained government debt in terms familiar to anyone who has used a credit card: "If you keep borrowing money and spend more than you earn, you eventually not only have to pay that back, but you have to pay it back with interest."

More recently, New Zealand Initiative executive director Oliver Hartwich argued that asset sales are necessary to relieve debt: "Without the asset sales we will definitely go further into debt." Advocates of the unpopular policy claim it will ultimately save \$6 million for the government, although the government has already spent \$26 million on the policy without yet selling any assets.

Government debt is actually relatively low in this country, although it has increased since the onset of the global financial crisis. Government debt makes up 37% of GDP, compared to private debt which makes up 166% of GDP. By not distinguishing between government and private debt, the government obscures the nature of the crisis, and finds a justification for the upward redistribution of wealth.

Global financial crisis: Private debtors come home to roost

In reality, the global financial crisis is

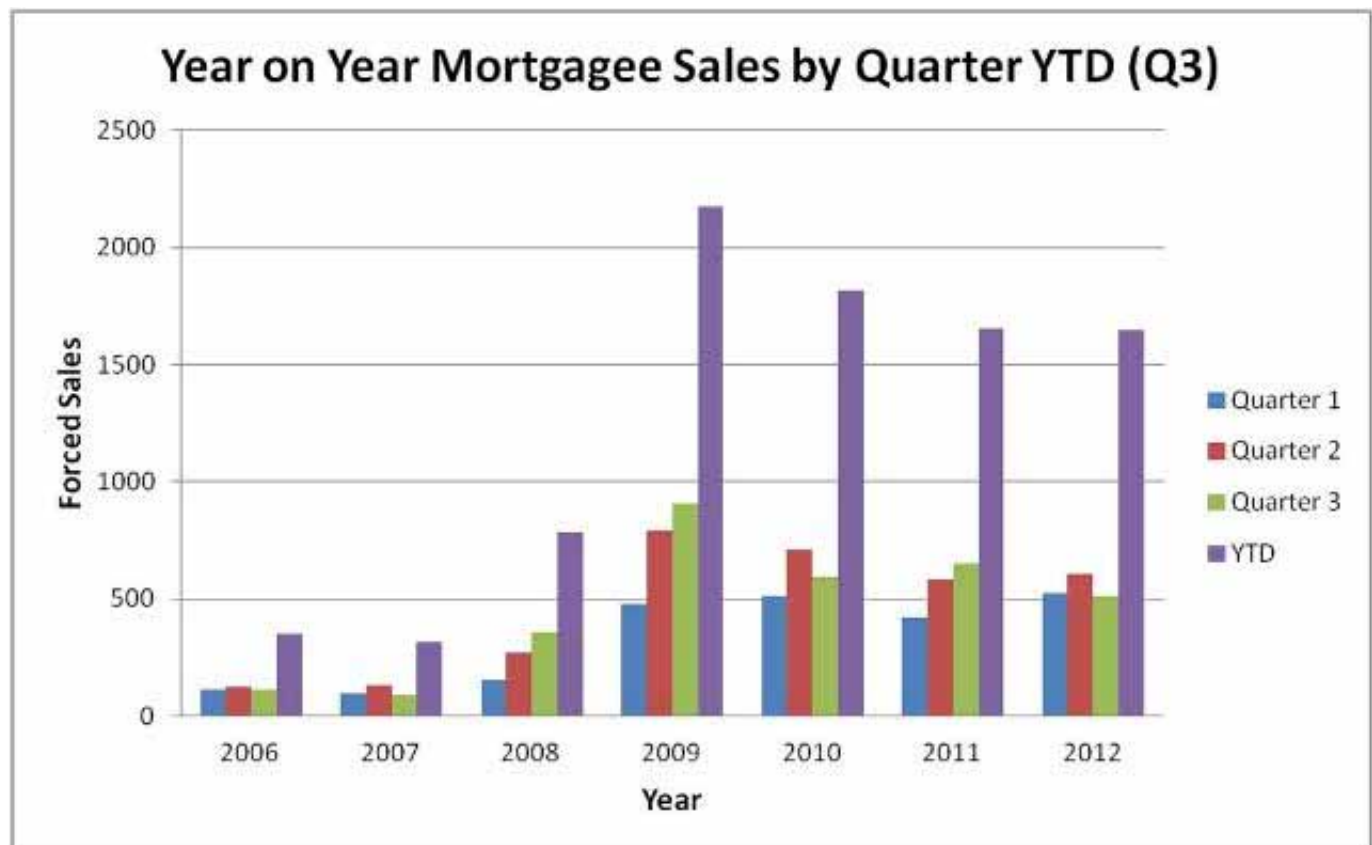


Fig 2

Campaigning against debt/International

primarily an issue of private, or household debt. It's well-known that in the US circa 2008, the housing boom collapsed, leading to mass foreclosures. Aotearoa/NZ has not been so drastically affected, although mortgage sales have increased significantly since 2008 (Fig 2).

While we have not yet seen the mass foreclosures of the US, 90% of private debt is in housing. The Labour Party has proposed a policy of building 100,000 new "affordable" homes, an investment into the growth of fictitious capital (see Kiwibuild and housing in the modern capitalist economy, The Spark, February 2013). In opposition to this pro-

capitalist agenda, socialists demand significant investment in state housing under democratic planning. In a real sense, isolated struggles against eviction in Glenn Innes and elsewhere are struggles for the whole class; workers and progressives must support them.

Many continue to labour under the burden of private debt. While finance companies such as South Canterbury Finance were bailed out, (to the tune of 1.8 billion in that case) indebted workers largely remain indebted. Occupy Wall Street's "Strike Debt" group recently launched a project called Rolling Jubilee, which purchases private debts and then cancels them. While this will

provide needed relief, and may help to de-stigmatise debt, it does not fix the system that continues to indebt people. Debt amnesty for workers and students would be a meaningful reform to fight for. However, private debt cannot be permanently overcome within the profit system. All struggles against parts of capitalism; student debt, declining real wages, the housing crisis; must be united into a struggle for socialism. We must build conscious, independent revolutionary socialist groups to help unite these struggles into one.

Iceland's "peaceful revolution" – Myth and reality

Writers for Fightback

Those following Occupy circuits, and other forums concerned with economic justice, may have heard notions of an "Icelandic revolution." In this narrative, the Icelandic government refused IMF conditions, nationalised the banks, gave debt relief to its citizens, and 'crowdsourced' a constitution. With Icelandic activist Hordur Torfason soon to tour Aotearoa/NZ, this narrative is worth investigating.

There are elements of truth to this story, elements of mystification, and some lies. In reality, the Icelandic government has always accepted the terms of the IMF. However, a dispute over Icesave – a dodgy "savings" scheme that frittered away billions of dollars – caused an internal crisis over the terms of repayment. The British government demanded that the Iceland government pay back the debt in full. When the people of Iceland rebelled, the conservative president refused to sign the agreement, forcing a referendum. As Icelandic blogger Baldur Bjarnson notes:

"The Icelandic governments have always accepted the terms of the Dutch and the British... The voters disagree and only get a say because the president is keen on making everybody forget that he is a banker collaborator" (<http://tinyurl.com/boqxdk5>).

The referendum concerned the terms of repayment, particularly interest, not the fact of repayment. Although Iceland's internal political crisis has forced negotiation, it is not true that the government has blanket refused IMF conditions; as in Greece, Spain and elsewhere, they are *negotiating*. Bjarnson also notes that while the government wrote off the banks' debts, debt relief for the people of Iceland has been more tiered and less accessible.

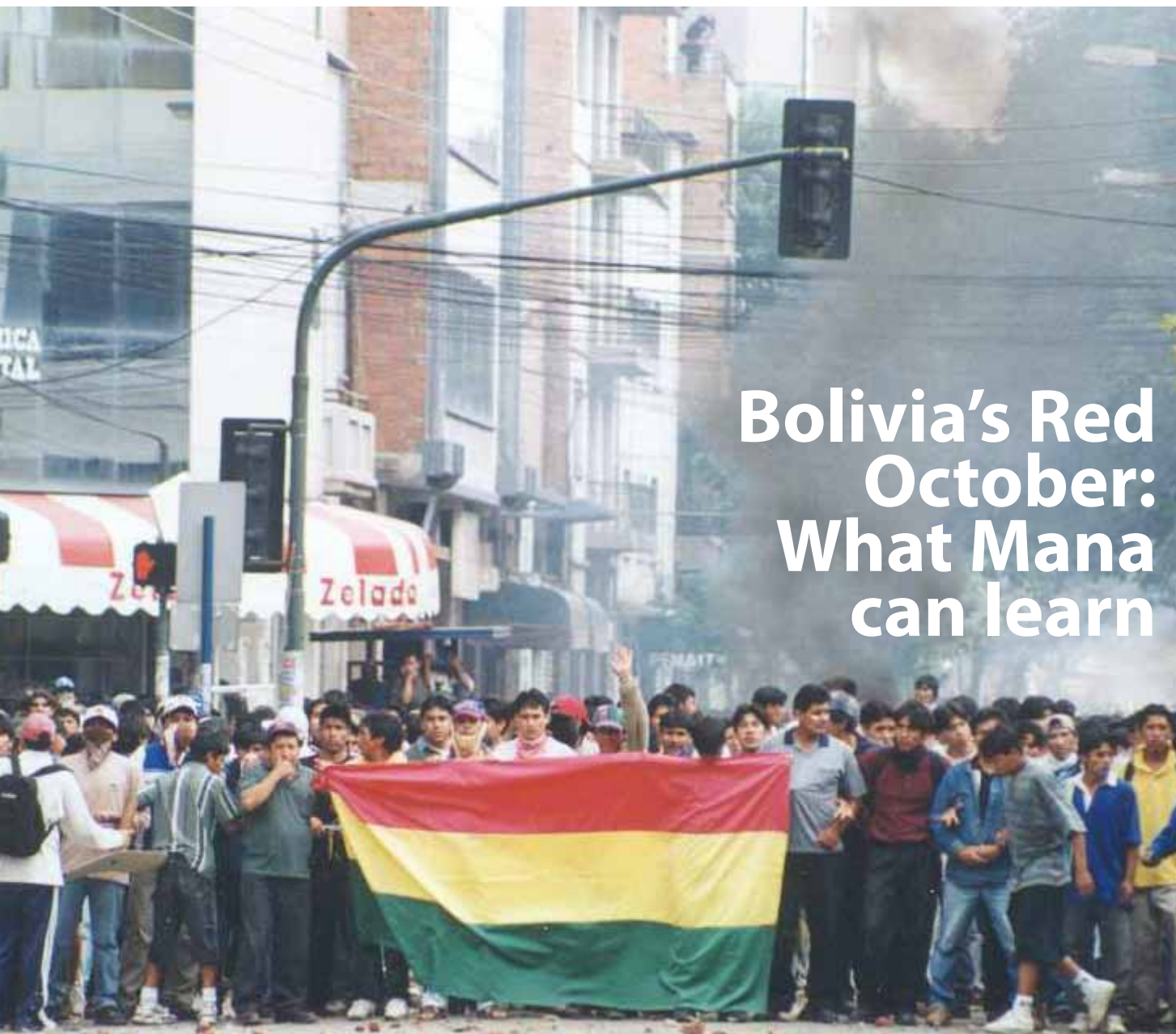
It's also said that Iceland 'crowdsourced' a new constitution. An article entitled 'A Deconstruction of "Iceland's On-going Revolution,"' on free alternative magazine the Reykjavik Grapevine, notes that the reality is more complex. Iceland held a non-binding referendum to elect a Constituent Assembly of 25 people, to write a new constitution – however

when this process collapsed, 25 were 'appointed' to draft a new constitution.

Although the government is seeking submissions via social media, the constitution is now being written and amended by politicians and government bureaucrats. It has not been co-written by the masses, as is often implied. The Reykjavik Grapevine notes how this myth inspires those fighting austerity, dictatorship and capitalism worldwide:

As a publication we strive to practice good journalism, though we have to say that a part of us is reluctant to correct these kinds of articles, as it is nice to see citizens of other nations, like Spain and Portugal, being inspired by our story. Hope has to come from somewhere (<http://tinyurl.com/3ed9ucz>).

Although we certainly need inspiration, simplifying (or lying to ourselves) can be dangerous. No "peaceful revolution" has taken place in Iceland; no benevolent government foregoing debt to relieve its people; rather, the people of Iceland have forced the government to give some concessions, in a contradictory political crisis that could present opportunities for revolutionaries.



Water protests in Cochabamba, Bolivia

Mike Kyriazopoulos reviews Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia, by Jeffery R. Webber

This major study of the movement in Bolivia that delivered hammer-blows to the neoliberal project is rich in lessons for activists in Aoteroa.

In tracing the movement's origins, Webber notes how its indigenous activists are inspired by the tradition of the anti-colonial hero of the 1781 insurrection against the Spaniards, Túpaj Katari. Before Katari was drawn and quartered for his role in the six month siege of La Paz,

he warned the colonialists that he would "return as millions", and the protagonists of recent rebellions see themselves as the embodiment of this return.

Another influential figure was the writer Tristán Marof, who advanced the slogan "Land to the Indians" alongside "Mines to the state". Marof went on to become a founder of Trotskyism in Bolivia, which was influential amongst the vanguard of the working class, the miners. Events such as the Catavi Massacre of 1942, when striking miners and their families were machine-gunned by the army are indelibly burned into the collective consciousness of the working

class.

After a prolonged period of dictatorship in the 1970s, the union movement, in alliance with indigenous activists launched a general strike. Electoral democracy was eventually restored in 1982. However, this was followed by a "neoliberal revolution" in 1985, which saw the privatisation of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and the proliferation of subcontracting, leading to informalisation and fragmentation of the working class.

In the 1990s, the government introduced legislation granting indigenous

people “recognition of certain linguistic and traditional rights by the state, while simultaneously reinforcing the neoliberal mechanisms responsible for the dramatic increases in their exploitation and suffering over the previous decade.” (p.138) The state aimed to divide and domesticate indigenous movements through “selective co-optation”.

In 2003, the programme of neoliberalism extended to offering contracts for water and natural gas to transnational companies at the behest of the IMF and World Bank. The state was confronted with unprecedented opposition. Consumers in Cochabamba faced new water tariffs raised to approximately US\$35 per family per month, in a city where the minimum wage was around \$60. The Fabriles union was central to the fight-back. The union made an explicit effort to join in various community struggles, and to organise unorganised, temporary, subcontracted, and precariously situated workers, especially women and young people.

The indigenous movement specialised in road blocks, an example of their communal discipline, with its dual components of obligation and rotation. Aymara peasants demanded that the new water-bill not be passed because it violated communal indigenous understandings of water: “...in the logic of the ayllus [independent indigenous communities], water cannot be bought or sold, or subjected to market logic because water is a vital part of life: it is the blood of the pachamama... Mother earth, pachamama, would die if it [water] became a commodity with market value”. (p.157)

The blockades triggered police repression and militarisation of indigenous areas. In April, low paid police mutinied. The street-kids took a leading part in the confrontations. Seventeen-year-old Victor Hugo Daza was martyred. Days later, the “Water-War” was won, with the government annulling the private contracts.

The greatest upheavals were still to

come. Resistance to gas privatisation centred on the shantytown of El Alto, perched on the edge of the Andean Plateau overlooking the Bolivian seat of government, La Paz. El Alto has expanded massively, with the influx of peasants from the plateau, and displaced former mineworkers. Social movement unionism was vital to the resistance, with the unions reaching out to all of the oppressed. At the same time, indigenous identity was proudly on display. At every gathering there was a sea of brightly-coloured *wiphala* flags, women wore their *pollera* skirts, and the Aymara language frequently replaced Spanish. The numerous neighbourhood committees that sprung up mirrored the communitarian organisation of the *ayllus*. These forces united to form a “combined oppositional consciousness” against the state and its imperialist masters.

On 20 September, the army responded to roadblocks by massacring indigenous people in Warisata. The COB union federation declared an indefinite general strike in response. By October, further clashes led to militarisation of indigenous areas. The level of state repression was such that even middle class layers were staging hunger strikes in protest at the government onslaught. In all, 67 civilians died and 400 were injured during Red October. As well as defending public ownership of gas, a key demand became the resignation of President Sánchez de Lozada, the face of neoliberalism. By 17 October, Sánchez de Lozada had the support only of a fraction of the political elite and the US embassy. He fled to Miami, and was replaced by Carlos Mesa.

A further uprising erupted in May-June 2005. Up to 90% of highways were blockaded, and protesters occupied hydrocarbon facilities. Webber observes that Evo Morales’ MAS party limited itself to demanding 50% royalties on petroleum-profits, rather than full nationalisation demanded by the left-indigenous bloc. The mobilisations culminated in a demonstration up to

half a million strong in La Paz. On the 6 June, Mesa resigned.

The election of Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president in December 2005 represented a democratic gain in race relations and a consolidation of what had been a growing sense of indigenous pride in the majority of the popular classes over the preceding decade.

However, Webber notes that MAS’s first years in government have exhibited “major continuities with the neoliberal model of political economy it inherited from antecedent governments.” (p.329)

The left-indigenous bloc was motivated by “freedom-dreams” of: (i) equality, the end of poverty, and the abolition of social classes; (ii) a future free of racism; (iii) dignity, social justice, and basic necessities; and (iv) socialist and indigenous-liberationist democracy.

But it “lacked a revolutionary party through which the necessary leadership, strategy, and ideological coherence might have been provided to overthrow the existing capitalist state and rebuild a new sovereign power rooted in the self-governance of the overwhelmingly indigenous proletarian and peasant-majority.” (p.328)

It is easy to list the major differences between Bolivia and Aotearoa. Bolivia occupies a highly subordinate place in the imperialist hierarchy of nations, while New Zealand is a junior partner of the most powerful; 62% of Bolivians identify as indigenous, compared to 14.6% as Māori here; and so on. Yet the Mana movement can learn plenty from the “combined oppositional consciousness” of the Gas and Water-Wars.

Mana is essentially an alliance of Tino Rangatiratanga activists and revolutionary socialists. We face a neoliberal government hellbent on privatisation of SOEs. Thus far, our unions have failed to seriously embrace the concept of social movement unionism, with the exception of Unite. The interweaving of the politics of class struggle and indigenous liberation is our urgent task.

Anonymous



Anonymous hacktivists: “Self-organisation of the computer nerds”

Guy Fawkes mask, associated with Anonymous, worn at a Wellington demo in solidarity with Palestine
by Daphne Lawless

For those who've been watching Internet culture for a while, it's still a bit of a culture shock to see Anonymous being discussed in the mainstream media. As this article is being written, Anonymous has been credited with bringing down the website of a large private university in India whose boss had been censoring Internet articles criticising him. Also in the news, Anonymous claims to have hacked some 600,000 Israeli email accounts as part of an ongoing campaign. The media generally describe Anonymous as a “hacktivist” group. But the most important thing to understand is that Anonymous is not a group of any

sort, or an ideology. It's an idea, and a culture.

The birthplace of Anonymous as we know it was the infamous webforum 4chan, whose “random” board (/b/) is known (among much less polite things) as “the cesspool of the internet”. Contributions to 4chan are all credited to “Anonymous” – there is no way to trace any image or message to any individual. Under the Anonymous moniker – except a permanent ban for anyone posting child pornography – posters to /b/ (known as “/b/tards”) are free to act out the darkest impulses of their psyche and of the cultural environment.

The board has become notorious as the place to go for the most sexist, racist, homophobic, gory and other-

wise transgressive content imaginable. However, the no-limits creativity of this environment also has also given birth to so many of the Internet jokes we can now take for granted. “LOLcats”, for example, began as a 4chan custom known as “Caturday”. You can now buy T-shirts, calendars, badges and other items featuring images and concepts which had their origin on 4chan. Of course, the anonymous originators of this content don't get a slice of the profits.

In this culture, harassment and “trolling” are not only tolerated, but considered high entertainment. Those who get on Anonymous' wrong side can expect to have their personal details broadcast, their websites and email addresses

hacked, and to be harassed with prank phone calls and bogus pizza deliveries – and worse.

But – perhaps surprisingly – the power of Anonymous began to be used for pro-social causes. One famous target of Anonymous was an American teenager who posted a YouTube video of himself abusing his pet cat. Another was neo-Nazi talk radio host Hal Turner, who was driven off air and unmasked as an FBI provocateur.

If Anonymous can be said to have any principle – apart from “doing it for the lulz” (i.e. the laughs) – it is that of preserving its environment, a free Internet. In the past five years, Anonymous have declared war on powerful social institutions which threaten that freedom.

In January 2008, the Church of Scientology bullied YouTube into taking down an internal video of its biggest celebrity convert, Tom Cruise, making a bizarre speech in Scientology jargon. This was brought to 4chan /b/s attention, in a post which specifically called for the power of Anonymous to be used in a good cause:

“I think it’s time for /b/ to do something big... I’m talking about hacking or taking down the official Scientology website. It’s time to use our resources to do something we believe is right.”

Scientology’s official website was indeed “taken down” by Anonymous hackers. But Project Chanology, as the attack was called, didn’t stop there. Anonymous began an ongoing campaign of harassment against Scientology, on the net and in real life. The young enthusiasts for Chanology joined up with existing critics of Scientology to organise street protests and media coverage.

Anonymous was the perfect foil for Scientology, an organisation notorious for suing its critics and attempting to destroy them personally. You can’t slander someone whose name you don’t know, and while you can destroy an organisation, you can’t destroy a meme.

Anonymous brought the techniques

of guerrilla warfare to internet activism. With no centralised controlling mechanism, individuals or small collectives could take independent action, or co-ordinate initiatives via one of their many online forums.

In June 2009, Anonymous found its next “big target” in the government of Iran. As part of the crackdown on protest after the disputed Presidential elections of that month, the Iranian

“The “political” turn of Anonymous produced a internal resistance. Many long term 4chan denizens resisted doing anything for a “good cause” – in /b/s peculiar homophobic dialect, this was called “moralfaggotry”. It’s important to remember, even today, that many Anonymous actions are taken in service of a political agenda – and others may be pure wanton destructiveness, for “the lulz”.

government shut down social media and websites used by protestors. In response, Anonymous in the West took down Iranian government websites, and made free internet access available to Iranian

dissidents.

One online commenter suggested:

“Not only did Operation Chanology [sic] get some of the more serious /b/ tards organized, it got their minds more organized as well... [and] gave them the idea that they could do stuff that doesn’t involve spamming the Fox News forums”

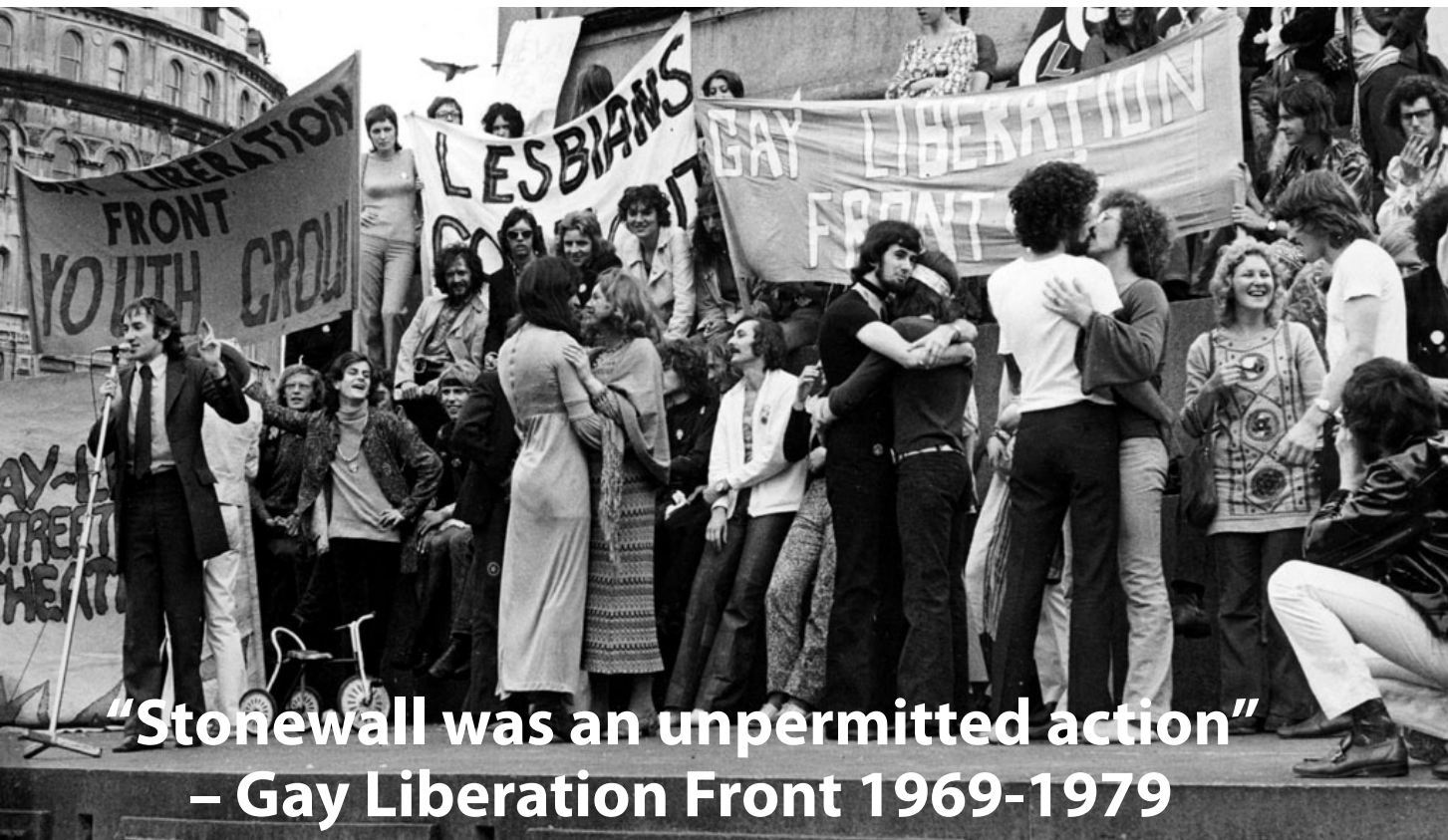
The “political” turn of Anonymous produced a internal resistance. Many long term 4chan denizens resisted doing anything for a “good cause” – in /b/s peculiar homophobic dialect, this was called “moralfaggotry”. It’s important to remember, even today, that many Anonymous actions are taken in service of a political agenda – and others may be pure wanton destructiveness, for “the lulz”.

Anonymous is not a socialist movement by any stretch of the imagination. Its politics could be best described as techno-anarchist – opposed to any governmental or corporate power which aims to censor, privatize or otherwise shut down free expression or free exchange in the media. They come from the same social milieu as the anti-copyright Pirate Party, which has won seats in some European legislatures.

But Anonymous is best seen as “the self-organisation of computer nerds”. Highly skilled yet socially marginal information workers have come together to “do something big” against the major powers of the world. Some major activists in Anonymous have been tracked down and prosecuted by state agencies. But there’s no way you can prosecute an idea.

Anonymous shows that all the repression in the world can’t stop motivated activists who can identify the weak points in the system, exercise effective power over the means of communication. This is a lesson that needs to be relearned by the wider working class in the 21st century.

Queer liberation



“Stonewall was an unpermitted action” – Gay Liberation Front 1969-1979

This article is adapted from a public talk by Ian Anderson, active in the Workers Party and Queer Avengers. The talk was originally delivered at Wellington’s Marriage Equality Conference in November-December 2012. It gives a snapshot of the “Gay Liberation” movement of the late 1960s-1970s.

“In 1969, the night of the Stonewall riot, was a very hot, muggy night. We were in the Stonewall [bar] and the lights came on. We all stopped dancing. The police came in...

We were led out of the bar and they catted us all up against the police vans. The cops pushed us up against the grates and the fences. People started throwing pennies, nickels, and quarters at the cops. And then the bottles started. And then we finally had the morals squad barricaded in the Stonewall building, because they were actually afraid of us at that time. They didn’t know we were going to react that way...

It was street gay people from the Village out front-homeless people who lived in the park in Sheridan Square outside the bar-and then drag queens behind them and everybody behind us. The Stonewall Inn telephone lines were cut and they were left in the dark...

All of us were working for so many movements at that time. Everyone was involved with the women’s movement, the peace movement, the civil-rights movement. We were all radicals. I believe that’s what brought it around.

You get tired of being just pushed around.”

–Sylvia Rivera, interview by Leslie Feinberg (Workers World Party 1998)

The 1969 Stonewall Riots, which galvanised the Gay Liberation movement throughout the First World, are a well-documented but little understood rupture. On June 28th, 1969, a regular police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a queer-friendly bar, triggered resistance from marginal queer communities in New York City. This event can only be

understood in the context of a wider process of social transformation, while the ensuing political project – “Gay Liberation” – contained internal contradictions which are still relevant today.

Gay Liberation: Continuity and disruption

Gay Liberation groups weren’t the first to take up the cause of “homophile equality.” In the US, the Mattachine Society formed out of the Communist Party in 1950; in the UK, the Homosexual Law Reform Society formed in 1960; in Aotearoa/NZ, the Dorian Society formed in 1962. However, these were politically safer than the later Gay Liberation groups, less concerned with visible public actions, and were ‘boys’ clubs’ to a significant degree. The Gay Liberation movement is notable partly as a rupture with this kind of politics.

The Stonewall Riots also weren’t the first queer public rupture of their kind. In the US alone, the 1965 Dewey’s Lunch Counter Sit-In, (LGBT African Americans resisting a ban on ‘non-conformist clothing’) and the 1966 Comp-

ton Cafeteria Riots, (transfolk fighting police harassment) both preceded this explosion in 1969. The Stonewall riots are remembered partly because of the radical political organisations which formed.

Many queers were already active in the wider movements of the time, as highlighted by Sylvia Rivera, a trans-woman who played a founding role. The movements against US imperialism, for Civil Rights, for women's liberation, gave queers the confidence to fight back at Stonewall. With the skill-sets gained from their work in social movements, queer activists returned to the Stonewall Inn over subsequent nights, organising and distributing leaflets.

In early July, radical queers in New York formed the first "Gay Liberation Front." Notably, this name aligned with anti-imperialist liberation struggles, particularly the Vietnamese National Liberation Front then resisting US occupation. The Gay Liberation Front organised regular public demonstrations. Groups outside New York, and outside the US, began adopting the name Gay Liberation Front – growing to more than 80 chapters worldwide.

Radical movements and solidarity

Standing in solidarity with the radical movements of the time, Gay Liberation groups also had a radical analysis of society. The Gay Liberation Manifesto written 1971 goes beyond the call for reforms, and links the struggle for gay liberation with a wider struggle against the imposition of restrictive gender roles:

"Gay liberation does not just mean reforms. It means a revolutionary change in our whole society... The long-term goal of Gay Liberation, which inevitably brings us into conflict with the institutionalised sexism of this society, is to rid society of the gender-role system which is at the root of our oppression."

Radical queers were largely isolated from the established working class organisations of the time; unions and Stalinist parties, which tended to be socially conservative. Although sections of the New Left showed solidarity with gay liberation, queer radicals generally lacked economic and political clout.

In some rare cases, links were forged between queer radicals and the established working class organisations. The Builders Laborers Federation in Sydney, influenced partly by communist involvement, took up demands of the wider community including the demands of gay liberation. When Jeremy Allan Fisher, an "early member of gay liberation" was thrown out of Macquarie University in 1973, the BLF placed a green ban on construction work. Allan reports that this was the first time an industrial union took action in defence of gay rights.

In New York, the movement split between reformists and radicals. In 1971 Sylvia Rivera formed the Street Trans Action Revolutionaries (STAR) out of the Gay Liberation Front, while ex-members formed the Gay Activist Alliance, which became increasingly single-issue. While the single-issue "gay" movement began to win reforms, it dropped the trans* demands and radical perspective in the process.

1972-1979: Gay Liberation in Aotearoa/NZ

In Aotearoa, the first Gay Liberation groups formed in 1972, the year of the first National Gay and Lesbian Conference. Gay Liberation Front branches opened in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, and Christchurch.

Also in 1972, takataapui/lesbian activist Ngahua te Awekotuku was denied a visa to the US (reportedly aiming to visit the Black Panthers) on the basis of "sexual deviance," triggering protest actions. In the following years, Ngahua te Awekotuku and Barry Lee would

popularise the term *takataapui*, or close companion of the same sex, to refer to gender and sexual variance in Maori communities.

Various gay liberation groups came together in the National Gay Rights Coalition, which lobbied for reforms. MPs proposed Homosexual Law Reform Bills in 1974 and 1979, however these were compromised by proposing a discriminatory age of consent for gay men. The National Gay Rights Coalition actually lobbied MPs to vote against the 1979 bill, stating they were "not prepared to accept anything less than full equality."

Although the last Gay Liberation Front groups dissolved in 1979, they were succeeded by other local groups which continued to lobby for reforms.

Lessons for today

A number of key lessons, observations and questions can be drawn from this historical snapshot. A key point to remember, often brandished on banners in the US, is that *'Stonewall was an unpermitted action.'* Although some may argue that gay welfare has improved since 1969, making street-fighting less of a necessity, gay liberation was a rupture from the politics-as-usual of reformist groups. Many of the problems that triggered the initial Stonewall Riots; police violence, trans* oppression, homelessness; continue to this day.

This raises the question of how to build strong coalitions beyond a single-issue basis. Even the name 'Gay Liberation' is controversial in queer politics, covering only one letter on the LGBT+ spectrum. As Angela Davis asked in a speech at Occupy Wall Street: "How can we be together in a unity that is not simplistic and oppressive? How can we be together in a unity that is complex and emancipatory?" Revolutionary organisations can play a key role both supporting existing queer struggles, and pushing towards more radical demands.



Review: Black Faggot

by Ian Anderson

Black Faggot, performed in Auckland for Pride and Fringe Festival, should tour everywhere. Playwright Victor Rodgers' examination of the "gay Samoan male experience" is timely and important. It's also a crowd-pleasing comedy, selling out for its first season. Direction, by Roy Ward, is spare and character-driven. Iaheto Ah Hi (Sione's Wedding) and Beulah Koale (Shortland Street) perform in simple black outfits – with no props, no pre-recorded soundtrack, and simple lighting cues. In Auckland's black-walled Basement Theatre, this simplicity allows the performers space to bounce a range of roles off each other, including various gay men and fa'afafine, their friends, family members, and tormentors. This two-man setup also allows for some excellent gender-bending performance, with Iaheto Ah Hi particularly relishing

his portrayals of a Samoan mother and a fa'afafine artist.

Rodgers' play is well-timed, given the recent press focus on homophobic Pasifika leaders. According to Colmar Brunton polls, around 60% of Pasifika respondents support marriage rights, a similar amount to the general population. However, the play explores the complexity of double oppression for Pasifika queers: particularly the dominance of conservative churches (a closeted Destiny Church member prays to be straight) and the challenge of articulating an identity (a Samoan mother stumbles over whether to call her child "fa'afafine" or "gay").

The play also acknowledges the racism faced by Pasifika queers, including in gay spaces. In an interview for Gay-Talk Tonight, writer Victor Rodger notes: "Race is something that always fascinates me and that is absolutely a product of growing up in Christchurch." While Black Faggot focuses more on

struggles within Pasifika communities, the play humorously highlights the corporate palagi monoculture of many gay spaces: "You know the one thing that makes me wish I was straight? The music they play in gay bars."

Although nodding to the Civil Union and Marriage reforms, Black Faggot focuses mainly on personal relationships rather than legal reforms. The play should remind us of the importance of solidarity within communities; the importance of families supporting their fa'afafine, queer, and gender variant brethren. While some may find the slogan "it gets better," spoken to a struggling queer kid near the end of the play, overly passive – it doesn't "get better" until we make it better – the play reminds us that the struggle for liberation has just begun.